

**Malabar Trogon 3(1) 16- 17.**

**Greybreasted Laughing Thrushes (*Garrulax jerdoni*)**

(Here we are reproducing excerpts from a discussion on the geographical distribution of Grey-breasted Laughingthrush in Kerala that appeared in the e-mail discussion group keralabirder. Comments on this subject from the readers are welcome. – **Ed.**)

Dear all,

A recent debate on species splits in OB fired up my interest on this group of Laughing Thrushes (*Garrulax jerdoni*) . I thought I put some information, which I could collect in a mail & pose a few questions too.

There are three subspecies of this bird in the whole of Western Ghats. They are as follows.

*G. jerdoni jerdoni* : From Goa through Karnataka to Brahmagiris

*G. jerdoni fairbanki*: North of Achenkovil(Ariankavu) gap/pass (8° 20'N to 9° 00'N) to as far as Wynad (?).

*G. jerdoni meridionale*: South of Achenkovil gap, Ashambu hills

I could track the records from the following areas in Western Ghats, mainly in Kerala – I must have missed out a few in the other states.

Mahendragiri : A note from Christopher was obtained at an RDB website where it clearly mentioned the sighting of *meridionale*.

Kalakkad : Latitude indicates *meridionale*.

Neyyar: This area is south of Achenkovil pass. Hence the subspecies occurring here has to be *meridionale*.

Peppara: Same as above.

Shendurney: The area seems to have an overlap with the latitude but it is still south of Achenkovil pass. Study by Susanth Kumar indicates both *meridionale* and *fairbanki* to occur here.

Periyar: Should clearly be *fairbanki*

Kodaikanal and Palani Hills: A common bird there; *fairbanki*

Munnar, Eravikulam, Grass Hills and higher reaches of Chinnar: An extremely common bird there. *fairbanki*.

Nelliampathies: A P Kinloch did not find the bird here. Ali & Ripley mentions "not in Nelliampathies" basically referring to AP Kinloch's studies. It was found during the recent survey we conducted. Sightings by P K Ravindran & team from Nellikkulam. The call was recorded from Minnampara (again PKR). The subspecies found here is believed to be *fairbanki*.

Silent Valley: I believe the subspecies found here is also *fairbanki*.

Aaralam: This was recorded by Sashikumar et al in the ongoing survey series in the sanctuary. Being adjoint to the Brahmagiris, the race found here is the nominate one *jerdoni*. This probably is the first record of this subspecies in Kerala.

Brahmagiris: Southern most range of *jerdoni* which adjoins Aaralam in Kerala.

Talakaveri: *jerdoni*

Kudremukh: *jerdoni*

Kemmengundi: *jerdoni* race recorded by Thejaswi.

Pushpagiri/Kumaraparvath: *jerdoni*

Caste Rock/Dudh Sagar Falls: *jerdoni*. The new IBA book does not mention this species to be found here but earlier distributions (Ali & Ripley) mentions "from Goa".

Now a few questions...

1. Is there an authentic record of *G. jerdoni* from Wynad. I found the IBA book mentions it for Wynad WLS. But there is a little confusion here. The species list in the book for Wynad WLS is also based on Gaston & Zacharias' paper on Wynad District. Wynad District is a much larger entity than Wynad WLS itself and includes several high altitude areas like Vellarimala. Hence several species mentioned as present in WynadWLS is infact not true. The species is probably absent in Wynad WLS but may be present in adjoining areas. Has the survey conducted in North Wynad come across this bird, if yes, is the race certain ? What is considered as the geographical barrier separating *jerdoni* & *fairbanki* ? Wynad pass ?

2. C A Abdul Bashir & P O Nameer deals extensively with the distribution of Wynad Laughing Thrush *G. delesserti* and Nilgiri Laughing Thrush *G. cachinnans* in Silent Valley and mentions a clear demarcation of their altitude preferences (c.1700m). How did *G. jerdoni* fare there. This is the only forest zone in the entire ghats where both *cachinnans* and *jerdoni* co-exist.

3. Where is the northern most distribution of *G. jerdoni jerdoni*? Is there still a population of these birds in Goa (Castle Rock)? The altitude here is below c.1000m.

4. How wide is the geographical barrier that separates *meridionale* and *faibanki*, the Achenkovil/ArianKavu pass ? What are the chances of *fairbanki* individuals from the north of the pass getting distributed south of it? Do they interbreed?

It is interesting to note that the 40km Palghat gap did not have any effect on the subspecies characterisation of this species while a much smaller Achenkovil gap did have.

Threats: Among the three, i think fairbanki is the least threatened. It has a long stretch of semi-contiguous habitat in Anamalais and Palani Hills. It also distributes north of Palghat gap and south to Periyar block. meridionale also have a similar semi-contiguous habitat south of Achankovil Pass but the range is extremely restricted and cannot be termed as "large". jerdoni does not enjoy such a good semi-contiguous habitat and is disbursed mostly in pockets in high peaks in the entire stretch of Karnataka. Hence the jerdoni race is probably as threatened as the meridionale, if not more.

Laughing Thrushes were always considered interesting by evolutionary biologists. Is there any exclusive work on the 5 laughing thrushes(2 species & 3 subspecies) we have in the western ghats ?

Hope to find a few responses for this interesting subject.

best rgds

Praveen  
( Praveen .J)

Hello All,

Thanks to Praveen for starting an interesting discussion on the distributional status of the three races of *Garrulax jerdoni*.

First, I shall quote the distributional status of the nominate race of *Garrulax jerdoni*, in the Synopsis(Ripley 1982). (In Birds of Kerala (Ali 1969), this race was not included as the erstwhile Malabar District was not part of Travancore & Cochin while the author published the first edition of this book. But he has stated that the race *jerdoni* occurs in Wynad.)

‘1309 G.jerdoni jerdoni: Southwestern Karnataka in the Brahmagiri hills and the Banasore Peak at c.1500-1800m.’ (Ripley 1982).

Banasore Peak, sure, is in Wynad and there is at least historical record of this race in Wynad. Zacharias and Gaston (The recent distribution of endemic, disjunct and globally uncommon birds in the forests of Kerala State, south-west India. *Bird Conservation International*,1999) comments on this race, ‘...we obtained no records of the northern

population, which might have been expected to occur in Wynad.’ Alan Morley found this species ‘uncommon and rarely seen’ at Periya RF, north Wynad but does not seem to have been able to identify the race. As Praveen has suggested, this species might not be present in the Wynad WLS, but elsewhere in suitable habitat in Wynad. The inclusion in the IBA book may be from historical records( e.g. Davison 1883). It was not recorded during the north Wynad bird survey of 2003; but Wynad Laughing-thrush was recorded then at Kambamala. In my opinion, the Grey-brested Laughing-thrushes seen in Wynad, in all likelihood, belong to the race *jerdoni*. Interestingly, this species was recorded during the bird survey at Kakkayam RF (Kozhikode Dt.) in February 2003, but I’m not sure whether racial identification was possible. Considering the semi-contiguity of Kakkayam with Wynad forests- actually, Kakkayam lies west of Banasore peak- could these birds also belong to the race *jerdoni*?

My question is, do the birds found in the Silent Valley belong to the race *fairbanki* ? Or could they be of the race *jerdoni* ? I think that the latter is more probable and this will make the distributional range of the nominate race north of Palghat Gap to south-western Karnataka. At this stage, this is mere conjecture, but I strongly feel we should now have a closer look at the birds in Silent Valley.

The record from Goa was based on observations by Lainer.H (Birds of Goa(Part 1&2. Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 1999), I guess; but how it got omitted in the Castle Rock account (under the IBAs of Karnataka), I don’t know. The northernmost limit of this species in Karnataka, according to the IBA book is Kemmangundi & Bababudan Hills( 13° 28’60”N, 75° 44’ 00” E) and this is quite a distance south of Goa..

The distributional range of *fairbanki* : ‘1310 *G.jerdoni fairbanki* ...the hills of Kerala and western Tamil Nadu north of the Achankovil Gap (c.9° N lat.):Cardamom, Kannan Devan and Palni Hills (not recorded in the Nelliampathies), and High Wavy Mts,...’ (Ripley 1982).

According to Ali (1969), *meridionale* is found ‘north to and **including** the Achankoil Gap.’ This is very interesting: the ranges of the races *fairbanki* and *meridionale* actually do not have a geographical barrier between them. An expert in the geomorphological features of this area like Dr.S.Sathischandran Nair might be able to clear our doubts.

This takes us back to the factors, which caused the evolution of geographical races.

Regards

Sashikumar  
(C.Sashilumar)